

WALL STREET

Since my father had a flower shop,
some mornings in the summer he got me
up at five to go with him to the
flower market on Wall Street
up in L.A.

I dozed while he drove the truck up Alameda
past the refineries, junk yards, steel mills,
and factories.

When we got there, he grabbed a pushcart and
I walked beside him through the warehouses
full of roses, glads, carnations, and pom-poms;
they had plants there that looked so strange
you'd swear they could eat dogs.

He'd stop at a booth where a Japanese guy
was selling mums.

"How much?" he asked.

"Three a dozen," the Japanese guy said.

"How about two-fifty if I get six dozen?"

"How about two-sixty?"

And we piled them on the cart.

The cement was wet and the smells would come --
roses for awhile, then carnations, then some-
thing like malaria out of a swamp in Panama.
Dumped glads and daisies and orchids lay
rotting in piles on the curbs.

When he finished buying, we rolled the cart
to the truck and piled the bundles in the back,
locked it up, and went to a cafe there on Wall
for breakfast.

Japanese growers from Gardena,
Mexican growers from Encinitas,
German growers from Riverside sat around
drinking coffee and playing Liars' Poker.
They squinted at the serial numbers and called,
"Five sevens," "Six fives," "I'll pass,"
"I'll call."

We ate steak and eggs and watched.

An old florist named Sam came in.

"Yeah," he said, "florists are either gamblers,
crooks, or queers."

My father laughed and said,

"It's a gamble all right.

If we don't sell those flowers
we sure can't eat them."